

# Register Variation and the Dative Alternation in 20th-century American English

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Previous studies of the dative alternation (*I gave Mary the book* vs. *I gave the book to Mary*) have laid their focus on the various parameters that influence the choice of ordering, such as animacy, pronominality, definiteness, givenness and syntactic weight (see Bresnan et al. 2007; Bresnan and Nikitina 2009; Bresnan and Ford 2010; Collins 1995; Grimm and Bresnan 2009). Grimm and Bresnan's (2009) study is the first to draw on data from the Brown-family of corpora. Testing the diachronic changes that they found (with respect to the factors 'syntactic weight', 'pronominality' and 'thematicity') against four general text types – Fiction, Learned, Press and Prose, they suggest that the changes are general across the different varieties of text in the Brown corpora (Grimm and Bresnan 2009).

My paper builds on Grimm and Bresnan's (2009) work but extends the amount of data by including three rather than two corpora from the same variety, adding B-Brown (American English, 1931) to the dataset. For this study, I make use of all 15 text categories included in the Brown-family of corpora. For informative prose, those are press reportage, editorials and reviews, religion, skills and hobbies, popular lore, biographies and memoirs, government documents, and scientific writings, for imaginative prose, there are texts of general fiction, mystery and detective fiction, science fiction, adventure and western fiction, romance and love stories, and humor. All three subcorpora are syntactically analysed using the dependency parser Pro3gres (Schneider 2008). By using three corpora of American English that span evenly across the entire 20th century I will be in a position to draw more decisive conclusions about register variation and diachronic changes in 20th-century American English.

A logistic regression analysis that takes into account the parameters animacy, pronominality, syntactic weight, givenness and thematicity illustrates how these factors differ in their strength. By including a third data point as well as two more parameters, I will be able to verify Grimm and Bresnan's (2009) suggestion that text type variation does not play a role in the dative alternation. Hence, my study adds to previous research of syntactic alternations while being based on parsed data and thus allowing for more controlled and data-driven retrieval of variable contexts.

## References

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